

EXCERPT FROM UNITED STATES NAVAL INSTITUTE PROCEEDINGS, April 1950

TRIPOLI GRAVES DISCOVERED

By Lieutenant (J.G.) ARTHUR P. MILLER, JR., U. S. Naval Reserve

The bodies of five American Naval heroes of the Barbary Wars which have been lying unmarked, untouched, and unclaimed for nearly a century and a half have been discovered in Tripoli, North Africa.

The five were among thirteen officers and men who were killed in the explosion of the Ketch U.S.S. INTREPID September 4, 1804. The graves were found by the American consul in Tripoli with the help of an Arab harbormaster after a painstaking search which was begun by the State Department in 1938.

The overwhelming bulk of circumstantial evidence collected through hundreds of interviews of descendants of inhabitants of the town in 1804, and from other sources points to the fact that the bodies were five of possibly six which were mentioned as having washed ashore after the explosion close to the site where they were rediscovered.

The five bodies were reinterred in the spot where they were discovered, a high-walled cemetery on the outskirts of Tripoli overlooking the harbor. U.S.S. SPOKANE (CL 120), one of the fleet's newest cruisers, was dispatched from the Mediterranean to Tripoli where her officers and men paid their final respects to these heroes of yesterday's Navy before they were lowered into the ground for the last time, their graves now plainly marked.

The location of the five bodies after all these years recalls to mind one of the most dramatic and heroic chapters of American naval history. The thirteen officers and men--which five of the thirteen these are is not known--had bravely met their death on a mission which was a calculated risk and which, had it been successful, could have blown half the Tripolitan fleet into splinters.

The Tripolitan fleet on that fateful night in 1804 had been anchored close together near the seawall. The Bashaw's castle stood close by. The INTREPID and her crew of thirteen volunteers was to be sent into the darkened harbor as a "fireship" to be set off amongst the enemy ships. Had the dangerous plan worked, many of the enemy ships would undoubtedly have been sent to the bottom and even the heavily fortified castle might have been seriously damaged.

The scheme was a perilous mission in the finest tradition of the U. S. Navy. Commodore Edward Preble, who at that time was in command of the American squadron in the Mediterranean, knew the risk as did the gallant men who took part in the venture. In addition, there was at least one other man who knew, a man who at the time was in Tripoli, a prisoner of the enemy in the Bashaw's castle. He was Commodore William Bainbridge who conceived the plan and smuggled his idea to Preble on the outside.

Bainbridge and his officers and men had been captured by the Tripolitan pirates after his ship, the frigate U.S.S. PHILADELPHIA, had run aground on some uncharted rocks while chasing a smaller enemy ship some months before. The PHILADELPHIA had been captured intact by the enemy and Bainbridge and his crew had fallen into the hands of the Tripolitans. They were henceforth thrown into prison, from where, incidentally, they had an excellent view of the harbor.

Once in prison, Bainbridge had been able to get the confidence of Nicholas Nissen, the Danish consul in Tripoli. Through Nissen, Bainbridge was able to smuggle secret letters out of prison, letters which carried an innocuous message in regular ink and another secret message written between the lines in lime juice which was invisible to the naked eye. When a match was run under the paper by Preble, the message immediately showed up.

It was through Nissen that Bainbridge had been able to get a message to Preble suggesting the plan of sending a fireship into the harbor laden with high explosives, there to be exploded among the enemy shipping. According to the plan, the volunteer crew which was to man the fireship should escape out of the harbor in small boats after applying the match to the train.

Preble had tried this type of hit-and-run tactic before, and it had paid off handsomely in that case. That had been several months previously when another volunteer crew had sneaked into the harbor in a ketch and burned the PHILADELPHIA, rendering her useless to the Tripolitans.

Many of the officers and men who lost their lives when the INTREPID exploded had been among the crew of volunteers who had entered the harbor that night to board and burn the PHILADELPHIA. In a fierce battle, they had climbed over the rails of the ship, killed most of her enemy crew and burned her to the waterline. The leader of that earlier encounter was another early American Naval Hero, Stephen Decatur.

Now, Preble decided to try these tactics once more, tactics similar to some used by the British and American commandos and raiders in World War II. He put Bainbridge's idea into action.

He chose the ketch INTREPID for the mission. The INTREPID had been captured originally from the Tripolitans in a running engagement in the open sea and had been converted to an American man-of-war. Perhaps Preble thought that by using a ship whose lines would be familiar to the Tripolitans and by sending her into the harbor on a black night as a friendly merchantman, he could disguise the true purpose of the fireship. In any event, he chose the INTREPID and ordered her to be fitted out as a floating incendiary bomb.

A special compartment was built into the hold of the ketch just forward of her mainmast. One hundred barrels (approximately 15,000 pounds of powder in bulk) were placed in the hold. On top of this lethal load, 100 thirteen-inch and nine-inch shells were stacked, loaded and fuzeed, and ready for action.

A tube was run from the powder and shells to another compartment aft in the ship. Inside the tube was laid a train calculated to burn for fifteen minutes—time for the volunteer crew to escape from the doomed ship. The compartment aft was filled with combustibles which were to be set afire, in turn setting afire the train. It was thought that the fire in the after compartment would keep any boarders off the ship until it was too late.

Lieutenant William Somers, captain of the brig USS NAUTILUS, was chosen as the man to guide this fireship or "inferno," as it was then called, into the harbor. Somers had acquitted himself well in a battle with enemy gunboats only a few weeks before. When they heard that Somers was to lead the mission, the entire crew of the NAUTILUS asked to accompany their captain.

Somers, however, chose only four from his own crew. They were Thomas Topline, James Harris, William Keith and James Simms, all seamen. From the USS CONSTITUTION he chose William Harrison, Robert Clark, Hugh McCormick, Jacob Williams, Peter Penner and Isaac Cownes, all seamen.

Originally, one other officer besides Somers was to undertake the mission. He was Lieutenant Henry Wadsworth of the CONSTITUTION. At the last minute, however, Midshipman Joseph Israel of the CONSTITUTION came aboard the INTREPID with a message from Commodore Preble. He pleaded with Somers to take him along, and Somers finally obtained the consent of the Commodore to allow Israel to join the band as its thirteenth member.

Somers impressed upon his crew the seriousness and heavy risk of the venture and gave to each and every man the chance to stay behind if he wished. But each of the ten seamen voiced his determination to go and left their respective ships NAUTILUS and CONSTITUTION with a joke on their lips.

"Mind boys," one said according to the diary of a shipmate, "give a good account of us when you get home!"

All was now in readiness. A light breeze came up on the evening of September 4 and Somers and Preble decided that now was the time to go. At 2000 the INTREPID weighed anchor and got underway. Two of the fastest rowing boats in the squadron accompanied her to take off the crew after they had guided the ship into the harbor and had lighted the combustibles.

The ketch was convoyed to the harbor entrance by the brigs USS ARGUS, USS VIXEN and the NAUTILUS. These vessels then turned back but remained near at hand to watch the result and to pick up the rowing boats upon their return.

Everything seemed favorable for the success of the mission except that three Tripolitan gunboats were seen hovering about the harbor entrance. But the enemy ships disappeared, and the INTREPID approached in the manner of a friendly merchantman bound for an anchorage in the harbor.

It was a dark night, according to the eye-witnesses, and the INTREPID was soon lost to sight to most of those who stood watching on the decks of the American ships outside the harbor. The fireship entered the harbor and drifted slowly toward the anchored ships of war of the Bashaw's fleet. Several minutes elapsed with no more noise than the lap of the waves.

Suddenly, the sound of guns firing could be heard by the men watching from the ships outside. Almost instantly a jarring explosion reverberated through the harbor and the town and a great blaze of light outlined the INTREPID and the other ships in the harbor.

Lieutenant Charles G. Ridgely was intently watching the spectacle with night glasses from his vantage point on the deck of the Nautilus. Here is his description of the explosion:

"For a moment, the flash illumined the whole heavens around, while the terrific concussion shook everything far and near. Then all was hushed again and every object veiled in a darkness of double gloom. On board the NAUTILUS, the silence of death

seemed to pervade the whole crew; but, quickly the din of kettle drums, beating to arms, with the noise of confusion and alarm was heard from the inhabitants on shore. To aid the escape of the boats, an order was given...to show a light, upon the appearance of which, hundreds of shot, from an equal number of guns, of heavy calibre, from the batteries near, came rattling over and around us. But we heeded them not; one thought and one feeling alone had possession of our souls--the preservation of Somers and his crew.

"As moment after moment passed by without bringing with it the preconcerted signal from the boat, the anxiety on board became intense; and the men with lighted lanterns hung themselves over the sides of the vessel until their heads almost touched the water--~~a position in which an object on the surface of the water--~~a position in which an object on the surface of the water can be seen farthest on a dark night--with the hope of discovering something which could give us assurance of its (the boat's) safety. Still no boat came, and no signal was given; and the unwelcome conclusion was at last forced upon us... We lingered on the spot until broad daylight--though we lingered in vain--in the hope that someone at least of the number might yet be rescued by us from a floating plant or spar to tell the tale of his companions' fate."

That the explosion of the Intrepid, described in this vivid passage from Lieutenant Ridgely's notebook, was premature is certain. There was no blaze of combustibles preceding the explosion. It was also evident to those waiting outside the harbor that there had not been enough time to have allowed the ketch to have reached her target and exploded on schedule.

The exact manner of the explosion, however, remains a mystery and will probably never be ascertained for certain. The sound of the firing is said to have come from the enemy shore guns. The most widely accepted theory is that one of these shots from the shore batteries passed through the magazine of the fireship, igniting the concentration of powder and shells and detonating them. Another opinion holds that the Tripolitans sighted the American ship, boarded her, and that Somers and his crew set fire to the train and blew their ship up rather than let it fall into the hands of the enemy.

Bainbridge records that all thirteen of the bodies were recovered following the explosion, but he gives an account which varies somewhat from the bodies that were recently found. Bainbridge, incidentally, had appealed to the Bashaw to allow him to view the bodies as soon as he realized that the explosion he heard had been that of the Intrepid. The Bashaw reluctantly granted permission for Bainbridge and two of his lieutenants to see the bodies after they had been washed up on shore.

Bainbridge states in his dairy that two of the bodies were found in the bottom of the ketch itself which grounded on the rocks at the north side of the western entrance to the harbor. Another body was found in one of the two boats that had accompanied the Intrepid and had later drifted ashore to the westward.

Four others were discovered floating near the harbor and the six remaining bodies were found on the beach to the southeast of the town. This would place the latter group near the site of the present high-walled cemetery where they were found.

What has become of the sixth body or whether Bainbridge actually saw six and not five bodies lying on the beach is hard to say. The account he gives is sketchy and he mentions the number but once.

He notes down that all the bodies were so mutilated that it was impossible to identify them. He adds that the six were taken to the top of the bluff overlooking the beach where they were found and were provided with graves and that "they were laid to rest with all small honors that could be given them," including a funeral service which Bainbridge himself read over the graves.

These facts, except for the exact number of the bodies, which were set down by Bainbridge nearly a century and a half ago, have been borne out as a result of the exhaustive investigation initiated by the Arab harbor master of Tripoli, Mustafa Burchis, and the American consul in that city, Mr. Orray Taft, Jr.

The investigation actually got its start in 1938 when, in response to an inquiry from the American embassy in Rome concerning the fate of the men of the Intrepid, Mr. Burchis undertook a meticulous examination of old Jewish records, private Arab collection of letters, papers, and diaries, and interviewed innumerable descendants of residents of Tripoli at the time of the disaster.

The harbor master set down in detail the results of his investigations and wrote a complete report of the matter which was then transmitted to the American embassy in Rome. Unfortunately, however, this report was among American state papers which were burned by embassy officials in 1941 upon the outbreak of war. The investigation was revived last year when Mr. Burchis retraced his findings from his original notes. Together with Mr. Taft, he was able once more to piece together the story of the five graves.

"The Intrepid had exploded in a pass located about half way down the length of the present north breakwater and all the pertinent stories he (Mr. Burchis) has heard say that five bodies had drifted up on the beach in front of a cliff," Consul Taft relates in a report to the State Department concerning his research. "From this beach they were unceremoniously dragged to the cliff and interred in a rough pattern. I questioned Mr. Burchis at length as to his belief in the reliability of his information and could find no flaw in his pattern of investigation," Mr. Taft adds.

Mr. Taft and Mr. Burchis, together with the American vice consul, went to the cemetery, named the old Protestant Cemetery, on the outskirts of the town and directly above the cliff where Mr. Burchis said the bodies had been dragged. Mr. Burchis then without hesitation picked out five graves located in the northeast corner.

Subsequent to the burial of the bodies in 1804, Mr. Burchis explained, it became necessary to establish the old Protestant Cemetery for the burial of foreigners. Since five Americans were already known to be interred there, a wall was erected around the plot and the whole cemetery was dedicated in a ceremony which was attended by the then present diplomatic and consular officials, including those of the United States.

Upon this identification of the five bodies as being those of five men from the Intrepid, Mr. Taft sent a telegram to Vice Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, USN,

commanding the U. S. Mediterranean Fleet, stating that he had substantial evidence that the ~~graves~~ of five American sailors lost on the Intrepid in 1804 had been discovered. Admiral Sherman immediately arranged for a visit to Tripoli of Rear Admiral R. H. Cruzen, Commander, Cruiser Division Two, and the Spokane.

The five unknown sailors who had died so valiantly fighting for their country were given final honors in a colorful ceremony attended by many high diplomatic, military, and government officials. A band of Scottish Camerons played martial music as the detachment from the Spokane as well as a unit of the British Army stationed at Tripoli marched the half a mile from the two to the graves site.

In short addresses, Rear Admiral Cruzen spoke on the early history of the Navy and of its exploits during the Barbary Wars, Captain W. J. Marshall, USN, command officer of the Spokane, narrated the Intrepid mission, and Consul Taft told of research done to identify the graves and unveiled the memorial plaque to the five heroes. Lieutenant E. J. Sheridan, USN, chaplain of the Spokane, read a short prayer, and an honor guard of Marines fired several volleys over the new graves and played taps.

Interestingly enough, Joseph Karamanli, the present mayor of Tripoli and a direct descendant of the Joseph Karamanli who was Bashaw of Tripoli at the time the Barbary Wars, attended the ceremony with approximately 50 other guests.

The plaque honoring the five men was placed in the cemetery on the cliff by the officers and men of the Spokane. The money for the markers was collected through voluntary contributions. Individual plaques, which will be replaced at a later date by permanent markers, were placed near each grave.

On each of these individual plaques is written: "Here Lies An Unknown American Sailor Lost From USS Intrepid in Tripoli Harbor 1804"--a worthy tribute to the courageous sailors of the Navy of yesterday from the sailors of the Navy of today.

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UNITED STATES SHIP

SPOKANE (CL 120)

Saturday 2 April

(Day)

(Date)

(Month)

00-04 Anchored in Tripoli, Tripolitania in 13 fathoms of water, sand bottom, with 75 fath of chain to the starboard anchor on following anchorage bearings: Spanish Port 214°t; Breakwat Light 164°t, Beacon 136°t; Beacon 092°t. Boiler number 2 is steaming for auxiliary purposes. SCFA is Rear Admiral CRUZEN, USN, ComGrDiv TWO in the U.S.S. SPOKANE. 0215 Pursuant to the orders of the Commanding Officer dated 1 April 1949, serial CL120/QL, authority: U.S. Navy Regulations 1920, CODERRE, E.J. 204 41 66 BTG USN, returned aboard having completed temporary additional duty as U.S. Navy Shore Patrol, Tripoli, with the following members of the Shore Patrol: MALOI R.S. 409 81 49 CSC USN; ALDERMAN, A.O. 834 91 92 CM3 USN; ANSEL, J. 234 84 08 CM3 USN; BUELL, 798 35 62 MM2 USN; HAGY, J.A. 570 9219 ET2 USN; KNIGHT, A.L. 258 08 96 BM1 USN; LUTZ, C.W. 67: BT3 USN; LUTTS, C.W. 266 81 47 SH3 USN; PIERCE, J.B. 276 02 76 MM3 USN; HERR, J.E. 650 17 9 CF SPAULDING, R.H. 1088339 PFC USMC; MENTER, F.H. 316 73 83HM2 USN. 0215 Pursuant to the orders Commanding Officer dated 1 April 1949, serial CL120/QL, authority U.S. Navy Regulations 1948, 0625, LTJG C.W. STARR USN, returned aboard having completed temporary additional duty as Shore Officer at the local and military Police Headquarters, Tripoli. 0315 Pursuant to the orders c Commanding Officer dated 1 April 1949, serial CL120/QL, authority U.S. Navy Regulations 1948, 0625 LT R.H. EPLEY USN, returned aboard having completed temporary additional duty as the semi shore patrol officer, Tripoli.

A.M. Hazen
A.M. HAZEN,
LTJG, U.S.N.

08 Anchored as before.

A.M. Hazen
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LTJG, U.S.N.

09-12 Anchored as before. 0800 Mustered crew at quarters; absentees: none. 1000 The ceremonial party left the ship for ceremony to honor five American sailors lost in 1804 from t U.S.S. INTREPID. 1015 Made daily inspection of magazines and smokeless powder samples; condit normal.

A.M. Hazen
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LTJG, U.S.N.

12-16 Anchored as before. 1225 Ceremonial party returned aboard. 1300 Received fresh provisions for general mess from H. MOHAMMED BEN SAID, Tripoli, Tripolitania; inspected as to quantity by HATAWAY, E.H. CSC USN and as to quality by GROWICK, S. HM2 714 41 02 USN; peas 100 lettuce 620 lbs, celery 200 lbs, spring onions 200 lbs, radishes 290 lbs, grapefruit 300 lbs, barley 10 lbs; all fresh articles.

John Wells
JOHN WELLS,
ENS., U.S.N.R.

16-20 Anchored as before.

C.S. Alexander Jr.
C.S. ALEXANDER JR.,
ENS., U.S.N.

20-24 Anchored as before.

D.K. Sweeney
D.K. SWEENEY,
LTJG, U.S.N.R.

APPROVED:

EXAMINED:

W. J. Marshall
W. J. MARSHALL, CAPTAIN,

U. S. N.

COMMANDING.

T. A. Melusky
T. A. MELUSKY, LCDR,

U. S. N.

NAVI

TO BE FORWARDED DIRECT TO THE BUREAU OF NAVAL PERSONNEL AT THE END OF EACH MONTH

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NAVPERS 134 (REV. 11-48)

DECK LOG—REMARKS SHEET

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(Date)

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C.S. ALEXANDER JR.,
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20-24 Anchored as before.

Mustapha Burchis'
Account of His Research Concerning Burial
Place of the American Sailors of the S.S. Intrepid
(Translated from Arabic by Shafic Ibrahim)

I first heard in May 1938 of the five graves of the American sailors who died in the explosion of the "Intrepid."

At the time, Italy ruled my country and I was a "marshal" working with the Tripoli Port Authorities. The rank of "marshal" was equivalent to Sergeant Major and it was the highest rank a Libyan could get in the Italian Armed Forces. As head of all Libyans employed at the Port, I had a great deal of influence and the Italians often used my services in collecting and finding information.

One day Colonel Carlo Pumo, Port Commander, called me to his office—Port Captain Mario Battaglieri was also there. The Colonel showed me a message—No. 13625—received from the Civil and Political Affairs Office of the Tripolitanian Government informing Colonel Pumo of a telepress communication No. 212844, dated April 9, 1938, from the American Embassy in Rome, requesting any available information that might lead to the discovery of the whereabouts of the graves of the American sailors killed in the explosion of the "Intrepid" in 1804. Even if no information were available, the Embassy agreed to pay for any search made.

It seemed to me that the Italian authorities were not very interested in the subject, as they asked me to try and get any information available, making it clear that if my work met with success the Italian Port Authorities would not ensure my compensation and that whatever work I did would have to be reported to Rome first, and on my own responsibilities.

That day I went home with big dreams and great ideas. I thought of myself as the discoverer of a hidden secret, a secret of heroic death. I dreamed that the American Government would take me to America and I would be a great man. America was a dream to me, a dream of wealth and freedom and now I had my big chance of having it come true.

I discussed the problem with my family, relatives and friends. They all thought that I was crazy and sounded the same question, "How can you find graves of people who died and were buried in 1804?" "Yes, how?" I asked myself and I had no answer. However, against everyone's advice I decided to take a chance and try. In this decision, my wife stood by me and gave me all encouragement and help. For me this was a chance to make a dream come true.

The driving force behind my decision goes back to the way of life I lived and was living at the time when I started my search. I come from an old Moslem family that fought Italian colonization and kept fighting. One of my uncles was the present King Idris' private telephonist - when the King was our Prince, that was in 1914. Even now my uncle's family is known in Cyrenaica as the Ali Al-Telephone family. During one of the many battles with the Italians, I was taken prisoner at the age of 12. The Italians took me from Derna to

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Tripoli and put me to work. Ever since December 16, 1914, I have been working at the Port. I grew up among sailors - Arabs, Italians and many other nationalities. I could not get any formal education, I only learned to read and write Italian and Arabic - and my Italian, owing to more practice and use, is stronger than my Arabic. I got my promotions at the Port till I became "marshal". This gave me authority over Libyans but not Italians - they were the rulers. I enjoyed my work as harbormaster and I loved the sea and sailors. From sailors I first heard of a new world, America, where people are free and can become rich overnight. My mind exaggerated those stories and I imagined myself there; and that dream grew up with me. It would be exactly what I would do one day, go to America, become free and rich.

It was that dream, perhaps my familiarity with the sea, that decided me to find out more about the dead American sailors.

Besides the fact that those sailors were killed in 1804, in the explosion of the "Intrepid" in Tripoli harbor, I knew nothing of the subject. Thus my first logical step was to read about its history in order that my steps might be guided in finding the secret that had been hidden for almost one hundred and fifty years.

The Italian Authorities in Tripoli had many libraries which I visited day after day, after my work, to read the history of the Barbary Pirates. They all told almost the same story in few paragraphs. I found that the American "Intrepid" was a captured Tripoli pirate ship previously named "Mastico". The Americans used this sailboat for dangerous missions because it could be easily mistaken for a Tripolitanian sailboat. As such it was used successfully in 1803, under the captaincy of Stephen Decatur to enter Tripoli harbor and blow up the American "Philadelphia" before it could be used by the Pirates. In 1804, the "Intrepid" was sent on a more dangerous mission to blow up the Tripoli pirate fleet anchored in the harbor. The "Intrepid", with 13 sailors on board, exploded for reasons unknown, and what became of its sailors, no book mentioned.

Having saturated myself with the history, I turned my attention to the problem of getting information about the dead sailors. This took me to the following possible sources. The first was Suleiman Bey Karamanly who gave me permission to use his private collection of books, publications and manuscripts. This collection yielded no information to me because a large number of the publications were in Turkish which language I do not know. I was forced to get translators who could help me.

The Castle library was of great interest but yielded no new information. However, my constant trips to the Castle aroused the interest of an old guard who in his quiet manner daily inquired about my health and my studies; and in a longer conversation he accidentally mentioned municipality records and the Moslem Property Department records, saying that if I wanted any information of my missing relatives I could find something in those places, not here.

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Following the old man's wisdom, I carried my search to those two places. At the municipality I met another Karamanli who was head and mayor of the Moslem community in Libya. He gave me all assistance I needed, but there were no records that went as far back as 1804. At the offices of the Moslem Property Department I met the Director Ilmail Kamal, a Libyan historian well informed of Libyan history and events, but he knew nothing of the fate of the American sailors.

At this point, I found it interesting to compare the Karamanli family that I met - all respectable law-abiding citizens and leading figures of the Moslem community. They were great grandsons of Youssef Karamanli, who in 1800 ruled Tripoli with an iron hand and directed its piracy and the Barbary Wars with ruthlessness and intrigue.

Next, I visited the "Judge of Judges," President of the Moslem Courts, Mohammed Burkhis, an old learned man and one who gave the impression of never having lost his touch with old customs and habits of Bedouins. The stories he knew and had heard of about the naval battles between Americans and Tripoli Pirates were numerous, and he told me of the many ships that sank in Tripoli harbor and the many dead that were always found on the Eastern shores of the city. The story about the Eastern shore later turned out to be a fact, later, but at that point, it had no significance to me. The Judge, however, indicated in his conversation that the Christian churches in Tripoli might know something of the fate of the Christian sailors.

Seeing the wisdom of his suggestion, I got in touch with Monsignore Facchinetti who gave me permission to look at their registers of the dead. Two Catholic Brothers helped me during my short search of the Cathedral's archives. During this time the Brothers told me about Christianity and its greatness and way of life, trying to convert me to their religion. It was the first time I had heard about the infidel's religion and I admired it and saw how near it is to ours because we also believe in One God and a moral life. The differences, I thought, were not important and I remained a good Moslem. The Brothers, before leaving them, presented me with two books, one a history of Libya written by a Padu of the Apostolic Mission, the second book was a history of "Catholic Papacy" which I read carefully and which enlightened me greatly.

far

My work had so/taken as about three months; it got me no nearer to my goal but I benefited from the study. I also became so interested that I resolved never to give up. The more I pursued, the greater my interest became.

I resorted next to the Arabic and Italian newspapers. Sheik Mohammed Al-Misurati was Editor of the Arabic paper and also a teacher of the Koran. The Sheik was a well traveled man and well read. He told me of a story he had read while in Egypt in one of the Egyptian publications (whose name he did not remember) - a story of the 1804 Naval Battle in Tripoli; the story mentioned that "many" American sailors were killed during the Karamanli Wars and that those sailors were buried on the Eastern shore of Tripoli. The Sheik then added his logical conclusion "and maybe that is why the English cemetery started there." As a last word, on departing from the office the Sheik said to me,

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"Why don't you try the Old City; the elder Sheiks might remember things, but you must be careful how you approach them."

I departed from the Press Office in high spirits, and made my way to the British Consulate, Mr. Maclelan, who in the presence of his Maltese secretary, Robert Ghirlando, received me with open smile; I told them of my mission and asked them directly of any information that they could give me. My manner was perhaps too forceful, for I thought that those people had the secret I had been after and that they should give it to me. I was impatient. Their manner changed and they answered very coldly that a quest like that was not in their line, they knew nothing of it, and that they had already written an answer to the American Embassy in Rome in response to its request, saying that they knew nothing of the sailors.

Thus rebuffed, I went home as usual and felt like giving up all hope. By now all my friends and relatives thought I was foolish and unstable. My wife, as ever, was by my side and I talked to her at great length of my work so far. I did not and was not expecting my wife to be helpful because women, to us, are busy at home and not interested in men's problems. Suddenly she suggested that I go to Benghazi and then to Egypt to check on the story and talk to Libyan historians in Benghazi. Maybe some one of them would know.

Why I accepted the suggestion, I don't know, maybe because I was tired and wanted to go away. I cheered up and made ready to leave, taking time off from my work. Then came the problem of finance. My wife even sold her jewels to help pay expenses. My stay in the East proved only one point, that any information leading to definite facts had to be taken from old related stories and that meant back to Tripoli. 14

Back in Tripoli I was at my work again in my office waiting for some opportune time to go out and start getting information as to the best sources from which to hear the ancient stories.

Finally, I got an afternoon off and I was at the Maritime Agent's Office, Signor Andrea Farrugia. Signor Andrea told me of the many stories he had heard, stories told by the elders among the Jewish Community still living in the Old City. These stories told of the bodies that were buried on the East Coast of the harbor.

These constant references to the Eastern Coast convinced me that I should follow this line of research. Life in the Old City and the ancient traditions made approach to the people difficult. A direct approach would get me nowhere, so I started getting friendly with people, spending afternoons sipping tea and smoking and exchanging stories. One of these old men was "Hawoto Katuma," almost one hundred years old at the time; he remembered his father telling him of great explosions in Tripoli Harbor in the year 1804, and great fires that kept the city excited for days. Those were of ships that burned in the harbor and resulted in many, many American sailors being killed. Those sailors were buried where they were found on the Eastern Coast of Tripoli. Katuma then took me to the house of the aged Here Shaloun Akub, who took me around and saw to

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that I became a friend of the elder Jewish Community. The stated purpose of my visits was to have my fortune told. Over cups of tea and smokes my fortune was told time and time again. A great friendship developed between us, and stories were exchanged till the "Intrepid" history came up, and here my interest was at its greatest. Most of the people had heard stories from their fathers and grandfathers of five bodies of American sailors that were buried on the Eastern shores of the harbor exactly where the English cemetery is now. A Maltese seaman of about eighty-five remembered his father and cousin telling the same stories and said that there were five bodies that were buried where the Protestant cemetery is now. This was further confirmed by "Bakka," which means in literary translation "bedbug"; Bakka was an astrologer and a fortune teller (he died directly after the British occupation of Tripoli). He was fairly sure that the British or Protestant cemetery was started because of the five unknown graves.

That next day, after work, I decided to make another visit to the British Consulate. During the morning in my office Mohammed Zentuti, Port Pilot, was asking me whether I had learned anything in my quest, and we talked about the "Intrepid"; during that conversation I learned that currents in the port area are directed often to the Eastern shore. Since the present seawalls did not exist at the time of the Barbary Wars, that could explain exactly how the bodies of sailors could be washed to that location. In my mind, I became positive that the five unknown graves in the new Protestant cemetery were the graves I was looking for.

Thus I returned to the British Consulate. This time I was calm, quiet, and sure of myself. I talked differently than on the occasion of my first visit. I was after facts.

My first question was when and how did the British cemetery start. It turned out that in 1830, the wife of the British Consul in Tripoli, Mrs. Warrington, died, and that spot was chosen for burial. Why was that particular place chosen? After all, at the time it was a deserted, lonely place. The answer was, because there were already five graves there believed to be of Christians buried in the beginning of the century. When the wife of the Consul was buried, the place was walled and kept as a Protestant Cemetery. I was extremely excited by then and said to the British Consul, "these five graves are the ones I am looking for. They are the five American sailors killed in the "Intrepid" explosion."

I then inspected the cemetery and the graves, and some additional questioning confirmed to me the facts. I wrote my report in Italian. The report had original maps of the Old Fort area and the location and other illustrations drawn of the site of the graves. The Port Commander, Colonel Pumo, in the presence of Captain Mario Battaglieri, received my work to be forwarded to the American Embassy in Rome. That was in 1939, a year after I first started my work; the war had already started. My hopes fell soon after my report had been sent. Italy was an enemy of the United States in the war. What happened to my work, I don't know. Almost ten years of war passed by and I forgot that work.

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However, my friends and relatives were convinced of the fact that, after all, Mustafa Burchis was not a fool, and he did discover the secret and had reached his goal.

It was after the war on the sixth day of June, 1948, I was having a drink with some friends and reading the local Arabic paper, "Tarabulus Al-Gharb" when I came across a notice saying that the American Government was going to open a Consulate in Tripoli and that Mr. Taft will be first Consul. This notice revived a dead hope and I said to myself, here is a chance again. This time I will deal directly with the representatives of the United States Government. The American Consulate opened on the 19th of October, 1948. On December 20th, I sent my first letter to Consul Taft, reviewing my story and ending the letter thus, "I am at the disposal of the United States Government in order to let you know the fate of these heroic sailors."

On the 26th of January, Mr. Crray Taft, Jr., sent me a message informing me that my letter had been forwarded to Rome. This was followed on March 2nd, by a letter from Mr. Taft, saying "...this office would appreciate information on the location of the graves..."

The day was a memorable day to me when on Monday, 21st of March 1949, I went to the United States Consulate and gave them my information. On the 23rd, two days later, I was requested to meet Mr. Taft urgently, and was informed that my information has been accepted as correct and that the United States Navy had decided on a special ceremony on the 2nd of April to commemorate the death and burial of those brave sailors.

Thus it took place that through hard continuous work I discovered the graves of the five unknown United States sailors who bravely came to their death in the explosion of the "Intrepid" and whose graves are now a symbol of a period of history when the United States was at war with Tripoli. These graves are known now to all Americans who visit these shores, and a memorial ceremony is held every year.